

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000692

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KNNP](#) [AG](#) [IR](#) [IAEA](#)

SUBJECT: BOUTEFLIKA URGES IRANIAN COOPERATION ON NUCLEAR ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman; reasons 1.4 (B)(D)

11. (C) Ambassador took advantage of April 5 meeting on other issues with Presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir to inquire about the April 2-4 visit to Algeria of Iranian Defense Minister Shamkhani. Belkheir said the visit was part of a programmed exchange of bilateral visits, reciprocated the visit of former Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lamari to Iran a year ago, and took place after being postponed once or twice for various reasons. Asked what message Algeria sought to convey during the visit, Belkheir said President Bouteflika sought to encourage dialogue, a responsive Iranian stance on the nuclear issue, and a general calming of tensions surrounding the issue.

12. (C) According to Belkheir, Bouteflika specifically urged Iran to be responsive to Western overtures and to cooperate in finding an acceptable solution, specifically citing explicit U.S. support for the UK/French/German efforts to achieve an acceptable negotiated solution as well as the U.S.'s new willingness to support Iran's accession to the World Trade Organization and to supply aircraft spare parts. These were significant gestures, Bouteflika repeatedly stressed, and Iran should find a way to respond positively to them.

13. (C) Ambassador reminded Belkheir that it was not just the United States that was concerned about Iran's intentions. France, the UK, and Germany were concerned as well, and the IAEA, in its most recent report, had referred to "a confidence gap" regarding Iran's nuclear activities. One could not take Iranian protestations of innocence at face value in view of its two decades of concealing its activities from the IAEA and continuing failure to be forthright with the IAEA. Iranian development of a nuclear weapons capability would be profoundly destabilizing for the region, and we could not afford to get it wrong. We were not opposed to the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. We were opposed and concerned about efforts to develop a nuclear weapons capability under the cover of a civilian nuclear program. We wanted a diplomatic solution to the issue but it had to be a real and verifiable solution that addressed international proliferation concerns.

14. (C) Belkheir agreed that Iran's nuclear activities needed to be carefully monitored to ensure compliance. In response to a question, he said that the specific issue of uranium enrichment did not come up. The discussion was at a more general level, with Shamkhani asserting Iran's peaceful nuclear intentions and Bouteflika urging responsiveness to Western and IAEA concerns. Belkheir said Bouteflika would have a private dinner with Iranian President Khatami that evening (April 5) in Paris, where both men were attending a UNESCO conference, and would continue to press for Iranian responsiveness and cooperation vis-a-vis Western concerns.

15. (SBU) In terms of the public aspects of the visit, the Iranian News Agency reported Bouteflika as saying April 3 that mutual relations with Iran and the exchange of high-ranking delegations at various levels showed the willingness of the two countries' leaders to promote ties. The same report indicated that Bouteflika had emphasized the willingness of Algeria to implement the agreements signed during Bouteflika's visit to Iran last year and Khatami's recent return visit to Algeria. Shamkhani reportedly underscored the geo-political significance of Algeria in the Maghreb and Africa and called for the expansion of relations between Iran and Algeria. He also briefed on Iran's defense and military capabilities and noted that Iran was ready to provide Algeria with various defense equipment.

16. (SBU) Algerian press reports noted that Shamkhani's visit was the third of three high-level Iranian visits to Algeria over the past year, including the visits of President Khatami last October (2004) and of Iranian National Security Council Adviser Ruhani this spring. These same accounts have played up Algeria's (self-assumed) role as a country which has the ear of both the U.S. and Iran and which is thus well-positioned to play a calming role on the nuclear issue. Citing non-official sources, the Algerian press also said Shamkhani carried a message from senior Iranian officials stressing Iran's attachment to its right to develop its nuclear capacities for peaceful purposes. Shamkhani told Algerian television his visit achieved & good results8 and was a positive step towards cooperation between the two

fraternal countries...8

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